

Rancho Patient Breaks Scientific Ground

By Michael Wilson



Erik Sorto pictured with (seated) Dr. Mindy Aisen, chief medical officer of Rancho Los Amigos, (standing) Dr. Christianne Heck, associate professor of neurology at USC and codirector of the USC Neurorestoration Center; Dr. Richard Andersen, the James G. Boswell Professor of Neuroscience at Caltech; Dr. Charles Y. Liu, professor of neurological surgery, neurology, and biomedical engineering at USC.

34 year-old Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center patient Erik Sorto is the first person in the world to maneuver a robotic arm just by thinking about it. Details of his journey are chronicled in a clinical study conducted by Caltech, Keck Hospital of USC, and Rancho Los Amigos published last month. Two years ago, Sorto had microchips implanted in the region of his brain that controls thoughts and intentions. By imagining, or thinking about a movement, the sensors are able to relay his thoughts via computer to a free-standing robotic arm. With the right amount of focus and imagining, he can shake hands, pick up a glass, and play a game of “rock paper scissors.” For the father of two paralyzed from an injury 13 years ago, the technology offers a new path to independence and the chance to finally indulge in small luxuries, like drinking a beer. Brain implants, called neural prosthetics, is an exciting frontier for researchers looking to im-

prove functionalities for patients with spinal cord injuries and help them make more fluid, natural gestures and movements. Although the science is not new, they have previously only been implanted only in the motor cortex area of the brain where the individual steps of an action are broken down and completed. Sorto is the first patient to have implants in the posterior parietal cortex (PPC) region of the brain where movements are planned instead of executed, says clinical trial lead investigator Richard Andersen. The result is that movements are less choppy. “We are at a point in human research where we are making huge strides in overcoming a lot of neurologic disease,” says neurologist Christianne Heck, associate professor of neurology at USC and co-director of the USC Neurorestoration Center. “These very important early clinical trials could provide hope for patients with all sorts of neurologic problems that involve paralysis such as stroke, brain injury,

(See ‘**SORTO**’ on back)

A Message From the Director



The story of our Rancho Los Amigos patient (to the right) is amazing. It is amazing for bringing hope for patients with neurologic disease. Also because when some people think of county hospitals they don’t realize that we are frequently on the cutting edge of life-changing research. There are many other examples including that Olive View-UCLA Medical Center has become one of the nation’s leading institutions on the treatment of multi-drug resistant tuberculosis. Congratulations to the DHS nurses who were honored as part of National Nurse Recognition Week. Nurses are the glue that holds DHS together. Thank you for all you do for our patients. Congratulations also to LAC+USC and the clinics of Roybal, Hudson, El Monte, and La Puente for successfully implementing ORCHID. You have done a great job. Seventy-five percent of DHS is now on ORCHID. I can’t believe that the school year is already over. Fortunately, there is day camp. Both children happily bicycle off in the morning. I am a proud bicycling father.



For Thyroid Cancer Patients, Survival is Patient-Centered

By Lorenzo Brown, M.D.

The ‘Butterfly’ Endocrine Surgical Service at the Martin Luther King Jr. Outpatient Center (MLK) recently hosted its first thyroid cancer surgery survival celebration. The event brought together 15 patients and their families, physicians, and nursing staff. One patient had thyroid cancer surgery 30 years ago. The thyroid gland, which is shaped like a butterfly, affects metabolism and makes hormones that affect heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature, and weight. Thyroid cancers disproportionately affect women and also peak earlier for women (40s or 50s) than for men (typically 60s or 70s).

(See ‘**THYROID**’ on back)

Nurses Take Spotlight During Recognition Week

L.A. County nurses were honored last month for their spirit of compassion and dedication to service as part of National Nurse Recognition Week. Nurses from multiple county departments gathered at the California Endowment to participate in educational sessions and network with colleagues. A total of 14 “Nurse of the Year” awards were given to nurses, with the “Top Nurse of the Year” award given to Mary Ellen Mapes, RN, of Olive View-UCLA Medical Center. Congratulations to all!

Mary Ellen Mapes, RN / Department of Health Services
Melanie De La Cruz, RN, BSN / Department of Health Services
Sheryl Paul, RN, BSN / Department of Health Services
Kathleen Egan, RN, MSN / Department of Health Services
Henry Chendra, RN / Department of Health Services
Karen Sordan, RN / Department of Public Health
Barbara Hollis, RN / Department of Mental Health
Catherine Chao, RN / Department of Health Services
Lisa Jenkins Baughman, RN, PHN / Department of Public Health
Blanca Jimenez, RN / Department of Health Services
Maria A. Arellano, RN, BSN, MICN / Fire Department
Ramona Paolim, RN, CCRN, BSN / Department of Health Services
Tricia-Nicole Gandela, RN, PHN / Department of Children & Family Services
Gina M. Santa Cruz, RN / Sheriff's Department



El Monte Clinic Tackles Whooping Cough

By Josh Lamb, MHA and Henedina Liban, MD

The end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015 marked the largest outbreak of Whooping Cough in the state of California in recent decades. To help stem the spread, an outreach team was formed at the El Monte Comprehensive Health Center (El Monte CHC) to distribute Tdap vaccinations in the community. Dr. Henedina Liban, El Monte CHC’s associate medical director and service chief of pediatrics, and Josh Lamb, DHS management fellow, led a team of health center staff that included registered nurse Shirley Tran, RN, patient health educator Ivette Sandoval, and community worker Lucia Solorio. With the encouragement of administrator Ernest Espinoza, the outreach team formed partnerships with WIC Centers (Women, Infants and Children) in the El Monte and La Puente communities. The outreach team set up booths within the Centers and



provided all the necessary medical supplies and equipment. A process known as “cocooning” was used to vaccinate parents, caregivers, and other adults who come into contact with children. By doing so, children who are unable to be vaccinated or are not fully vaccinated will be surrounded by vaccinated individuals thus creating a layer of protection. Cocooning is a practice that is heavily recommended by the CDC, and often talked about at medical conferences and other events where vaccinations are discussed. Five cocooning events were held during March during WIC peak hours of operations. The team was able to successfully vaccinate 100 individuals for Tdap. Additionally, more than 160 potential patients inquired about either adult care or pediatric care at the El Monte Comprehensive Health Center, making the outreach events a huge success.

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Family history of disease, obesity, and exposure to radiation at a young age are known risk factors. According to the American Cancer Society, approximately 44,000 new cases are diagnosed annually. Treatment options depend on stage and type of cancer but can include surgery, hormone and radiation therapy, and chemotherapy. Patients that are told they have a thyroid cancer can develop a high level of anxiety and stress. The surgeons and nursing staff at MLK prepare and support patients to make the experience as smooth as possible. Over the last six years, the thyroid surgical team has treated over 100 patients needing thyroid surgery, and in some cases, multiple surgeries. Advancements in surgery have led to new surgical treatment options, including robotic surgery, and developments in genomics are

providing new insights into thyroid cancers. The surgical team removes tumors using smaller incisions that heal faster and has improved patient satisfaction with surgical treatment. The concept of a special clinic inspires patients to maintain the close follow-up and care with the surgical and medical endocrine teams. The testimony of other patients’ positive outcomes also provides new and existing patients with better understanding of the disease and treatment options. The doctors on the surgical service wanted to thank all of the patients and their families for having trust and confidence by having this inspiring event. They also wanted to recognize the support of staff for the great care they provide to patients before and after thyroid surgery.

DHS Makes Honor Roll

DHS has made the Immunization Action Coalition’s (IAC) Influenza Vaccination Honor Roll for mandating influenza vaccination in its 23 healthcare settings. The honor roll recognizes hospitals, medical practices, professional organizations, health departments, and government entities that have taken a stand for patient safety by implementing mandatory influenza vaccination policies for healthcare personnel. More than 500 organizations are enrolled. All DHS healthcare workers and volunteers, as well as clerical, dietary, janitorial, and laboratory staff, are required to receive influenza vaccine. Exemption to immunization is allowed for medical contraindications, religious beliefs, and personal reasons, but employees covered by this policy will be required to wear a mask while at work during influenza season.



(‘SORTO’)

ALS and even multiple sclerosis.” Three years ago Rancho Los Amigos made international news when 37 year-old Agnes Fejerdy, paralyzed from the waist down, demonstrated the hospital’s ReWalk exoskeleton robot. The device, which uses robotics, motion sensors, electronic controls and computers, enabled Agnes to stand up and walk across the room. Mindy Aisen, MD, Rancho Los Amigos’ chief medical officer and clinical professor of neurology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, says advancements in robotics and prosthetics hold promise for the future of patient rehabilitation. “We at Rancho are dedicated to advancing rehabilitation and to restoration of neurologic function through new technologies, which can be assistive or can promote recovery by capitalizing on the innate plasticity of the human nervous system.” Aisen said the research highlights the important role of robotics and the ability of the brain to learn to function in new ways. [Click here to view more about Erik’s story.](#)